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Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Sixty-first session

Summary record of the 24th meeting*

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Wednesday, 7 June 2017, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Ms. Bras Gomes

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Combined second and third periodic reports of Liechtenstein

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The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Consideration of reports

(a) Reports submitted by States parties in accordance with articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant (*continued*)

Combined second and third periodic reports of Liechtenstein (E/C.12/LIE/2-3; E/C.12/LIE/Q/2-3 and Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Liechtenstein took places at the Committee table.*

2. **Mr. Frick** (Liechtenstein), introducing his country's combined second and third periodic reports (E/C.12/LIE/2-3), said that the Government of Liechtenstein was committed to strengthening the United Nations treaty body system and fully supported the implementation of General Assembly resolution 68/268.

3. In considering the situation of Liechtenstein, it was necessary to bear in mind that around one third of its population of 38,000 were foreigners and that over half of employees commuted into the country every day, mostly from Switzerland and Austria.

4. Despite the financial crisis, the unemployment rate in recent years had remained at or below 2.5 per cent among the general population and at 3 per cent among persons aged between 15 and 24 years of age.

5. The fall in the gross domestic product brought about by the financial crisis had obliged the State to cut spending and to introduce adjustments and reforms to the social security system. However, no substantial cuts to benefits had taken place and, as a result of measures taken after 2008, the State budget was currently in a very healthy position. Social security and educational standards were very high and the strong economy offered a broad range of employment opportunities.

6. In December 2016, the Liechtenstein Human Rights Association had been founded, in accordance with the recommendations of several human rights bodies and the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (Paris Principles). The Association, which had a broad mandate, was responsible for advising and supporting victims of human rights violations, carrying out investigations and issuing recommendations on draft legislation.

7. The Government had improved the protection offered to victims, particularly victims of domestic violence, by adopting the Victims Assistance Act and establishing an office that provided such victims with immediate assistance and long-term support. Furthermore, the law governing sexual offences had been amended in 2011 with a view to expanding the legal protection provided for victims and the practical measures taken to tackle violence against women and children. The catalogue of offences that were prosecuted automatically had been extended to include dangerous threats against close family members, stalking, rape and sexual assault in marriages and partnerships, and forced marriage. The amendments had also strengthened the rights of victims in criminal proceedings.

8. The adoption in 2007 of the Law on the Declaration of General Applicability of Collective Agreements had enabled collective agreements to be applied to 13 sectors of the economy. In addition, the Liechtenstein Chamber of Commerce and Industry had established a collective agreement that covered approximately 12,000 employees. Although around 10,000 employees, representing some 28 per cent of the workforce, were still not covered by a collective agreement, the majority of them worked in the financial services sector, where average wages were among the highest in the country. It was also worth mentioning that the average salary in Liechtenstein — around 6,500 Swiss francs (SwF) per month — was relatively high in comparison to that in other countries. The establishment of a tripartite commission responsible for monitoring the labour market served to prevent "wage dumping" and the circumvention of regulations on the minimum wage.

9. In recent years, the Government had taken steps to improve the performance of migrant children in the education system. In 2008, measures to lower the language barrier

for children whose mother tongue was not German had been extended to kindergartens. Several studies carried out under the Programme for International Student Assessment had shown that the gap in achievement between foreign-language speakers from low-education households and their peers had narrowed in recent years.

10. The Children and Youth Act of 2009 established the principle of non-discrimination and the right to a violence-free upbringing. It strengthened protection for children and teenagers and set out regulations governing the obligation to report situations in which a child's welfare was in danger. The Ombuds Office for Children and Young People, which had recently been integrated into the Liechtenstein Human Rights Association, offered counselling to children and parents who were experiencing difficulties. Amendments to the Sexual Offences Act increased the protection of children from sexual abuse and other forms of sexual violence. New criminal offences such as child grooming had been introduced and the criminalization of child pornography and child prostitution had been expanded.

11. Amendments to the Asylum Act, which had entered into force in January 2017, streamlined asylum procedures, including those concerning cases in which asylum requests were inadmissible. The amendments introduced time limits on the issuing of an initial decision and provided that appeals against decisions taken by the Government could have a suspensive effect. Furthermore, persons who had been granted leave to remain in Liechtenstein on a temporary basis could be granted a residence permit if they satisfied certain conditions.

12. In response to recommendations made by the Committee (E/C.12/LIE/CO/1, para. 25), the Government had begun the process of amending the Foreigners Act to ensure that persons residing in Liechtenstein could not have their permanent residence permits revoked even if they were permanently and substantially dependent on social assistance. The amendments in question, which were expected to come into force in early 2018, would also repeal the article obliging the Office of Social Services to notify the Migration and Passport Office when a non-national had received over SwF 75,000 in social assistance.

13. **Mr. Dasgupta** (Country Rapporteur) said that the two cases cited by the delegation, in which a court had based its decision on article 13 (3) of the Covenant, and other cases in which a party had invoked a provision of the Covenant, clearly demonstrated that the Covenant could be and had been invoked in a court of law.

14. The Committee welcomed the establishment of the Liechtenstein Human Rights Association but wished to know more about how that body functioned and how its autonomy was guaranteed. In particular, it wished to know who elected the members of the Association and how its modest budget of SwF 350,000 sufficed to cover salaries, rent and other unavoidable items of expenditure.

15. The official development assistance provided by the Government fell short of the commitment to development spending of 0.7 per cent of gross national income (GNI), which the State party had not met since 2012. The Committee urged the State party to remedy the situation.

16. Noting that States were responsible for cooperating with each other to prevent tax evasion, and that Liechtenstein had recently adopted measures to promote greater transparency in such matters, including agreements on the exchange of tax data with some 60 countries, he said that he would be grateful for further information on the scope and extent of such data exchanges and the conditions under which they operated.

17. The Committee welcomed the amendments made to article 283 of the Criminal Code to prohibit discrimination on the grounds of language, nationality, ethnicity, religion, ideology, gender, disability, age and sexual orientation but wished to know why the amendments did not cover discrimination on the grounds of property, birth or other social status. The Committee would welcome further information on the implementation and outcome of the National Action Plan against Racism and on reports that women wearing headscarves had faced discrimination when seeking accommodation and employment. Had the authorities received any complaints about such discrimination and, if so, what had been the outcome of the investigations into those complaints?

18. Noting that only 22 per cent of parliamentarians were women, he asked what the corresponding percentage was among senior members of the civil service. He wondered whether the State party had considered using temporary special measures to improve the representation of women decision makers in legislative and executive bodies.

19. **Mr. Risch** (Liechtenstein) said that the Liechtenstein Human Rights Association was an independent institution whose members were elected from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other civil-society groups.

20. **Mr. Frick** (Liechtenstein) said that the board of the Association was elected by the institution itself and not by the Government. In addition to its budget of SwF 350,000, which it was free to spend as it wished, it was entitled to raise funds from the private sector.

21. Although it was true that the official development assistance provided by the Government had fallen to 0.5 per cent of GNI, only seven States in the world contributed a higher percentage than Liechtenstein. The Government remained committed to raising its contribution to 0.7 per cent of GNI.

22. In 2009, the Government had decided to take significant steps to support international cooperation and regulations in the area of tax transparency. Its efforts in that regard were carried out through its membership of the European Economic Area, its cooperation with the Global Forum on Transparency and Exchange of Information for Tax Purposes and other relevant bodies and through multilateral or bilateral negotiations and treaties. The Government had joined the group of early adopters of the initiative to implement the new global standard on the automatic exchange of financial information. Although not a member of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Liechtenstein had been assigned a key role in the OECD body responsible for developing the standard. The Government had implemented all the primary and secondary legislation required and had established an agreement with the European Union on the automatic exchange of information. The first exchanges under that agreement, which had entered into force in January 2016, were due to take place in 2017.

23. In recent years, the Government had successfully negotiated 17 double-taxation agreements in accordance with OECD standards, established 27 tax information exchange agreements, ratified the Convention on Mutual Administrative Assistance in Tax Matters and signed the Multilateral Competent Authority Agreement on Automatic Exchange of Financial Account Information. Arrangements that complied with OECD standards were currently in place to enable information on tax matters to be exchanged with over 90 partners. Liechtenstein had been assigned a rating of "largely compliant" in the peer review carried out by the Global Forum on Transparency and Exchange of Information for Tax Purposes, which demonstrated that, in legal and practical terms, it complied with OECD standards on tax matters. It had also participated actively in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development and had adopted the agreement established at the Conference. The Government reported to the relevant bodies on the measures that it took to prevent corruption, money-laundering and organized crime. As a result of all the efforts outlined above, it was no longer possible for tax evasion to be practised in Liechtenstein.

24. **Mr. Hasler** (Liechtenstein), responding to the question on gender equality, said that women constituted 40 per cent of members of the national Government, 12 per cent of parliamentarians, 43 per cent of officials at the Court of Justice, 23 per cent of judges and 45 per cent of teaching staff at Liechtenstein higher education institutions.

25. There were no plans to introduce legislation to increase the representation of women in politics. However, various other measures had been taken in pursuit of that goal, such as the introduction of a course that encouraged women to participate in politics and the conducting of a survey on the factors that determined why men and women decided whether or not to stand for office. Regional projects such as "Women Decide", which was run in conjunction with neighbouring regions in Austria and Switzerland, provided information and support, carried out awareness-raising activities and encouraged women of all ages to strive for political office and positions of leadership.

26. **Mr. Risch** (Liechtenstein) said that the Government had introduced many measures to promote tolerance and understanding among different ethnic groups. The Violence Protection Commission worked to combat violence in the public sphere and also religious and ideological extremism. From 2010 to 2015, the Commission had successfully implemented a raft of measures to combat right-wing extremism, including the launching of the campaign "Standing Up to Right-Wing Violence". As part of the Government project "Strength through Diversity", two conferences on integration had been held in 2011 and 2012. Furthermore, an expert group on right-wing extremism, reconstituted as the expert group on extremism in 2016, served as a contact point and counselling service for anyone who had come into contact with extremism in any form.

27. The promotion of mutual understanding and the tackling of xenophobia formed an integral part of the school curriculum. Children in secondary schools were taught about different religions and cultures. Partly as a result of the measures outlined, racial discrimination and intolerance were currently not a problem in Liechtenstein society.

28. **Ms. Kranz** (Liechtenstein) said that the school system played an important role in integrating non-nationals into society and promoting tolerance and understanding between the native and the immigrant populations. Education on tolerance formed an important part of the subject "life skills, religion and culture", which addressed all the major world religions and was taught in a way that allowed students of all ethnic backgrounds and religions to participate. Students were also taught the key principles of human rights and democracy and encouraged to act in accordance with them. Workshops on the prevention of bullying were also held for the benefit of teachers.

29. **Mr. Risch** (Liechtenstein) said that, under equality legislation, women who wore headscarves had the option of bringing a case to court if they experienced discrimination in the labour market. To date, no such cases had been brought before the courts.

30. **Mr. Frick** (Liechtenstein) said that the equality of all citizens before the law had been enshrined in the Constitution since 1921. In a recent judgment, the Constitutional Court had established that the principle of equal treatment applied also to non-nationals.

31. The Government had ratified a large number of international human rights conventions and had accepted the individual complaints procedures of some of them. The rights enshrined in such conventions could be invoked before the Constitutional Court. Since the accession of Liechtenstein to the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, the fundamental rights set out therein had regularly been invoked before the Constitutional Court.

32. Aside from article 283 of the Criminal Code, several other laws contained provisions that protected individuals against discrimination. For example, labour legislation expressly provided for the protection of the personality of employees, which was broadly defined as their gender, race, nationality and sexual orientation, among other characteristics. Provisions on non-discrimination were also contained in the Gender Equality Act and the Disability Equality Act.

33. **The Chair** said that she wished to know when the State party would ratify the Optional Protocol to the Covenant.

34. With regard to the survey on political participation mentioned earlier in the discussion, she asked what obstacles prevented women from standing for political office and what steps the Government was taking to address those obstacles.

35. **Mr. Windfuhr** (Country Task Force), noting that cases of discrimination against women wearing headscarves had been mentioned in a report issued by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, said that he wished to hear the State party's reaction to that report.

36. In view of the fact that the State party currently enjoyed a budgetary surplus, he asked whether the Government would consider increasing its official development assistance to 0.7 per cent of GNI.

37. Although the Committee welcomed the many steps taken by the State party to tackle tax evasion, he wished to know whether the numerous foundations that existed in

Liechtenstein enabled certain individuals and corporations to pay less tax. How did the delegation view the foundation model in relation to the discussion on tax evasion?

38. **Mr. Abdel-Moneim** said that he wished to know what the State party meant by the phrase "minimum available resources", which appeared in the heading of paragraph 11 of the replies to the list of issues. Was it a misprint?

39. He asked the delegation to indicate the extent to which the 17 double-taxation agreements and the 27 tax information exchange agreements mentioned in the opening statement were mandatory for banks and how far banks complied with those agreements.

40. **Mr. Uprimny** said that he would like the delegation to indicate whether domestic legislation required the State to provide reasonable accommodation to persons with disabilities. If no such requirements existed, he wished to know whether the State party would consider remedying the situation.

41. He asked why the State party did not possess data disaggregated by disability, when such data would enable it to determine whether persons with disabilities faced discrimination.

42. **The Chair** said that she wished to know whether the mandate of the Liechtenstein Human Rights Association included economic, social and cultural rights.

43. **Ms. Shin** said that she wished to know whether a link existed between the underrepresentation of women in politics and the expectations surrounding the role played by women in family life and childcare.

44. **Mr. Frick** (Liechtenstein) said that the taxation agreements mentioned by Mr. Abdel-Moneim were mandatory for all individuals, banks, institutions and corporations.

45. Foundations were an instrument of civil law and did not necessarily facilitate tax evasion. As domestic law required the beneficial owners of foundations to be identified, the taxes that such owners paid were subject to scrutiny.

46. Following their assessments of the Government's compliance with the recommendations issued by the Financial Action Task Force, the International Monetary Fund and the Committee of Experts on the Evaluation of Anti-Money Laundering Measures and the Financing of Terrorism (MONEYVAL) had concluded that Liechtenstein adhered to high standards in its efforts to tackle money-laundering and the financing of terrorism. Liechtenstein had been an active member of the MONEYVAL Committee for many years and, although not a member of the European Union, it implemented all the financial sanctions that the European Union had established.

47. It was up to the parliament to establish the percentage of GNI allocated to official development assistance. Although budget cuts had made it necessary to reduce the level of assistance, spending had been increased in other areas, such as projects to combat climate change.

48. **Mr. Hasler** (Liechtenstein) said that, owing to reductions in spending made necessary by the financial crisis, the Government had been reluctant to take on additional burdens and had not ratified the Optional Protocol to the Covenant for that reason.

49. The survey on the reasons why men and women did or not decide to stand for political office had found that women were reluctant to do so because they had a negative view of politics in general and did not wish to be exposed to the public gaze or participate in public arguments.

50. **Ms. Kranz** (Liechtenstein) said that the Government was keenly aware of the fact that women were underrepresented in the parliament. To address that problem, training in the area of political participation had been made available to women and the Office of Education had established plans to provide State-funded care for young children.

51. **Mr. Hasler** (Liechtenstein), referring to the issue of discrimination against women wearing headscarves, said that no complaints of such discrimination had been brought before the courts. The Office for Foreign Affairs had held discussions with NGOs,

including organizations for non-nationals and Muslim women, on eight occasions, during which no mention had ever been made of the issue of discrimination.

52. **Mr. Frick** (Liechtenstein) said that the mandate of the Liechtenstein Human Rights Association included economic, social and cultural rights.

53. **Mr. Hasler** (Liechtenstein) said that the lack of disaggregated data on persons with disabilities did not prevent the Government from knowing about their situation. The counselling centre established for persons with disabilities would inform the Government if it received any reports of discrimination against such persons.

54. **The Chair** said that, in view of the fact that the Government enjoyed a budgetary surplus, it was difficult to understand how a lack of resources could have prevented it from ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Covenant.

55. **Mr. Windfuhr**, noting that only 26.1 per cent of women were in full-time employment, said that he wished to know how the Office of Equal Opportunity monitored employment patterns and what measures were being taken to address the question of gender equality in the labour market. He wondered to what extent discrepancies in employment statistics for men and women were related to the provision of integrated childcare services.

56. The delegation had provided data disaggregated by gender and age but not by disability and ethnic origin; yet such data would make it possible to determine whether members of ethnic minorities and persons with disabilities faced discrimination in the labour market. He wished to know what measures had been taken to support the participation of persons with disabilities in the workplace and whether the Government would consider ratifying the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol.

57. The gender pay gap had been reduced from 20 per cent in 2006 to 16.5 per cent and he commended the measures taken to close the gap, such as the introduction of an annual Equal Pay Day and the adoption of the Gender Equality Act. However, he failed to understand the statement in paragraph 30 of the replies to the list of issues that 56 per cent of the pay gap could be explained by objective factors.

58. According to a report by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, there had been cases in the construction sector in which a bonus had been paid to all employees except those who had not mastered the German language. He asked what results had emerged from the research undertaken by the tripartite commission established to observe the labour market.

59. He commended the revision of the Gender Equality Act to expand the burden of proof on employers to include allegations of sexual harassment. He would be interested to know of other areas of employment in which women were exposed to discrimination.

60. He noted that the wage difference between Liechtenstein nationals and foreigners had fallen to 7.9 per cent in 2014. However, the wages of cross-border commuters had exceeded those of Liechtenstein residents for the first time in 2014.

61. He welcomed the repeal of the Civil Servants Act and its replacement by the State Employees Act, under which civil servants were permitted to strike.

62. Article 49 (b) of the Foreigners Act allowed foreigners' residence permits to be revoked if they were permanently and substantially dependent on social assistance. He noted that, under the bill to amend the Act, persons residing in the State party for more than 15 years could not have their permit revoked, even if they were dependent on social assistance. However, if their period of residence was less than 15 years and they had received more than SwF 75,000 in social assistance, their permit could be revoked. He pointed out that, according to the Committee's general comment No. 19, all persons with special needs, regardless of their status, were entitled to social assistance.

63. While the State party's average per capita income was very high, there was nonetheless an 11 per cent ratio of low-income households. He would be interested to know what poverty assessment procedures were in place and how the problem was addressed.

The meeting was suspended at 4.25 p.m. and resumed at 4.35 p.m.

64. **Mr. Frick** (Liechtenstein) said that the Office for Foreign Affairs, which was responsible for processing the ratification of international human rights treaties, had only 15 employees and hence a very heavy workload. Liechtenstein hoped to ratify the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities within the next two years.

65. **Mr. Batliner** (Liechtenstein) said that it was difficult to answer the question about the high levels of part-time work by women, since no data on the subject were available. Liechtenstein was quite a rural country, in which traditional family ideas prevailed and women felt that they bore responsibility for family welfare. Another possible explanation was the number of weekly working hours required by most contracts, namely between 42 and 45 hours. The Government was, moreover, aware of the fact that inadequate day-care facilities impeded the full-time employment of women in some cases and was endeavouring to address the problem. In recent years, large enterprises and financial service providers had begun to provide private day-care facilities, thereby enabling both parents to work. A working group that had been established in late 2016 to promote the reconciliation of family life and employment also focused on the provision of childcare facilities. A total of 1,253 children currently benefited from such services and only 11 were still awaiting access to a facility.

66. The part-time employment of women was one of the factors conducive to the gender wage gap. It was a vicious circle, because women who were in part-time employment or who had been absent for a significant length of time on maternity leave were unlikely to achieve promotion and higher wages.

67. The tripartite commission was tasked with monitoring sectors for which there was no generally applicable contract. As the construction sector did not belong to that category, it was not monitored. Minimum wages under generally applicable contracts could be 10 per cent below the normal minimum wage if employees were unable to perform their duties satisfactorily for any reason, such as disability or an inadequate command of the German language.

68. **Mr. Risch** (Liechtenstein) said that in 2010, according to family statistical data, one person had worked full-time and one part-time in two thirds of all households, whereas, according to the latest data, one person worked full-time and one part-time in only one third of all households.

69. **Mr. Frick** (Liechtenstein) said that the new Government attached great importance to the goal of ensuring that every family was able to choose whether both partners would work on a full-time or part-time basis.

70. **The Chair** said that States parties were not required to ensure that all persons could work on a full-time basis. However, proactive State support, such as the provision of day-care facilities for women, was required in order to offer both women and men a genuine choice.

71. **Ms. Walch** (Liechtenstein) said that all residents, whether citizens or foreigners, could obtain social assistance if they met the requirements. The draft amended version of the Foreigners Act contained a new paragraph in article 49, according to which a residence permit could not be revoked on the grounds of permanent and substantial dependence on social assistance if the person concerned had resided in the country for more than 15 years without interruption. The Migration and Passport Office, which administered the Act, investigated the grounds for revocation of a permit on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the courts' jurisprudence. Foreigners could obtain social assistance if necessary, but they were encouraged to return to the labour market and to become more independent. The amended version of the Act deleted article 69 (2) (e), which required the Office of Social Services to notify the Migration and Passport Office if a foreigner had received more than SwF 75,000 in social assistance.

72. **Mr. Windfuhr** said that the reasons for revoking the residence permit of a person who had been resident in the State party for less than 15 years and received social assistance were still unclear. Loss of residency could prove particularly difficult for persons with disabilities or for refugees and asylum seekers. He also wished to know whether access to social assistance was contingent on language tests.

73. **Ms. Walch** (Liechtenstein) said that the residence permit of a refugee or a person granted residence under the country's recently amended Asylum Act would not be revoked unless that person lost his or her refugee status for providing false information. Article 48 of the Foreigners Act also stated that a residence permit could be revoked in the case of persons who were unwilling to respect law and order, or persons who persistently failed to meet the conditions laid down in their integration agreement. Persons who had obtained a work permit but remained deliberately unemployed for a lengthy period might also have their residence permit revoked. The same applied to persons who received substantial social assistance for an extended period and failed to take any steps to end their reliance on such assistance.

74. **Mr. Risch** (Liechtenstein) said that, when employees were absent from work for three months, the seriousness of their disability was assessed in order to assist them in returning to work, finding alternative employment or attending a vocational training course for a different category of employment. They were also offered counselling, access to protected workplaces or financial assistance for freelance work. If they were unable to return to work, they could apply for an invalidity pension. If they returned to work but were impeded by a disability, they could apply for a wage subsidy.

75. There were 13 private day-care institutions in the country, 10 of which received State subsidies. A working group established by the Government was currently seeking to provide financial assistance to all of them. Low-income families who were unable to pay day-care centre fees could also obtain financial assistance. There were official regulations on the quality of the institutional care provided.

76. **Mr. Dasgupta** noted that, according to the report, the gender pay gap was only 3.4 per cent among employees aged between 20 and 24 but progressively increased until it reached 26.5 per cent among employees aged between 55 and 59. He asked whether the State party had looked into the possibility of reducing the pay gap by introducing flexible working hours and enabling women to use communication technology to work from home, for instance in the banking and financial sectors.

77. The percentage of women in the judicial sector was quite high, at 44 per cent, but there were very few women judges. There thus seemed to be a barrier to professional promotion, or what might be called a glass ceiling.

78. **The Chair** said that men, too, should be given the option of flexible working hours and home-based work.

79. **Mr. Batliner** (Liechtenstein) said that the labour legislation permitted all forms of work, but it was necessary for employers and employees to reach an agreement on such options. Very few people worked from home and there was certainly a glass ceiling for part-time workers, the majority of whom were women.

80. **Mr. Atangana** (Country Task Force) noted that, according to the report, the State party did not plan to ratify the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and he wondered why.

81. The Committee had requested updated data on domestic violence and the prosecution of perpetrators but had not received additional information. The report contained a table providing figures for police interventions in cases of domestic violence but omitted to mention outcomes. He asked whether perpetrators of domestic violence had been prosecuted and, if so, what penalties had been imposed.

82. Foreigners were required, inter alia, to provide evidence of German language skills in order to qualify for family reunification, but, according to the State party's reply to the list of issues, no changes were currently planned to the legislation on family reunification. He urged the State party to reconsider that position.

83. He asked what measures were being taken to assist needy persons who were denied access to benefits such as low-income family allowances.

84. The Committee had enquired about housing for non-citizens and the State party had replied that there was sufficient private housing and a relatively high number of vacant housing units. However, given the high cost of private housing, he wished to know whether

action was taken to alleviate the situation of foreigners and needy citizens who were unable to pay the required rent. He asked whether they had access to social housing.

85. He noted that action to address the risks of tobacco, alcohol and drug consumption among minors had led to a decline in the consumption of addictive substances. However, a certain amount of tobacco and intravenous drug consumption persisted. He asked whether specific measures were being taken to prevent renewed substance abuse by minors who had abandoned or reduced their consumption.

86. As there was only one hospital in the State party, he would like to know what arrangements were made for the medical care of persons not living in its vicinity. He asked whether low-income groups could afford compulsory health insurance. He also wished to know whether patients suffering from cancer, pulmonary vascular disease and other high-risk diseases had access to the requisite care from medical specialists.

The meeting was suspended at 5.25 p.m. and resumed at 5.30 p.m.

87. **Mr. Hasler** (Liechtenstein) said that he was unable to provide specific data on court sentences handed down for domestic violence. The authorities were looking into the matter and were considering the possibility of ratifying the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence

88. The police were required to report all suspected cases of violent crime to the Office of the Public Prosecutor, which opened an investigation and initiated a criminal prosecution, where appropriate. In 2015, the Office had registered 203 violent crimes against 183 persons, 76 of whom were female. The police had intervened in 19 cases of domestic violence and had reported all of them to the Office, which would compile statistics on such cases in the future.

89. In 2015, a total of 21 investigative or preliminary proceedings on physical violence had been conducted at the Court of Justice, of which 8 had been discontinued, and 20 criminal proceedings had been conducted before the sentencing court. In addition, eight investigative or preliminary proceedings on offences against sexual self-determination had been conducted at the Court of Justice, of which three had been discontinued. However, he was unable to provide statistics on the outcome of the proceedings.

90. With regard to the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, the administration's resources were strained and it tried to prioritize the most relevant treaties that had been signed or ratified by other European countries.

91. **Ms. Walch** (Liechtenstein) said that no amendments to the Foreigners Act concerning family reunification were currently contemplated. The existing provisions were compatible with the country's international obligations, and the right to family reunification was guaranteed. She drew attention in that connection to the details on integration measures contained in paragraphs 38 and 39 of the replies to the list of issues. In 2016, a total of SwF 200,000 had been budgeted for integration, including SwF 110,000 for language courses and SwF 90,000 for integration projects.

92. The draft amended version of the Foreigners Act contained a new paragraph 3 (a) in article 27, providing for an exception to the requirements to be met in order to obtain a permanent residence permit. According to article 42 (2) (c), foreigners who, owing to old age or their state of health, could not be expected to fulfil the obligations of an integration agreement could be relieved of the requirement to sign an agreement. As a result, they were not required to provide evidence of a successful civics examination or to possess certain German language skills.

93. Every foreigner had the right to family reunification, subject to article 33 of the Foreigners Act. For the purposes of the Act, a family included the spouse and joint unmarried children under the age of 18 years, and also adopted and foster children. Most people who had received a residence permit in recent years had come to Liechtenstein as a result of family reunification. She drew attention in that connection to the details contained in paragraph 41 of the replies to the list of issues. The draft amended version of the Act changed the provision governing the period of validity of a child's permit received by

means of family reunification. The period would henceforth correspond to that of the parent from whom the child had derived the right to reside.

94. **Mr. Risch** (Liechtenstein) said that the housing market was entirely private and there was no social housing. However, housing subsidies were provided for low-income persons, persons with disabilities and older persons who were unable to pay rent. Such persons could also request assistance from the Office of Social Services in finding an apartment. Persons with drug abuse issues or other major personal problems frequently required assistance and the Office occasionally paid the rent for them.

95. Individual and collective measures had been adopted to combat substance abuse. They included a no smoking campaign and a special programme for persons attending vocational training courses, who could win a prize if they abandoned nicotine consumption. Persons with drug problems could receive counselling services and obtain free medical assistance.

96. Single-parent families received financial subsidies. Counselling, training programmes and subsidies were also available for unemployed people, including persons with disabilities.

97. **Mr. Frick** (Liechtenstein) said that the existence of only one public hospital was not a problem, because Liechtenstein cooperated with neighbouring Swiss cantons and with Austria to ensure access to hospitals throughout the region. At least three or four hospitals could be reached by car in just 20 minutes. There were also some private clinics in Liechtenstein and patients had access to medical specialists in all diseases. Life expectancy was very high: 81 years for men and 83.2 years for women. Everyone, including low-income groups, had access to health care, which was subsidized by the State.

98. **Ms. Walch** (Liechtenstein), referring to recent case law on family reunification, said that in one case a family member had been unable to acquire basic German language skills. An expert opinion on the person's ability to learn a new language had been sought. The expert had concluded that the person's old age and educational background constituted an impediment and the person had therefore been exempted from the need to fulfil the language requirement.

The meeting rose at 5.50 p.m.